



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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State Health Department Offers Tips for Preparing a Safe Turkey

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health urges safe handling of turkey to avoid foodborne illness this holiday season.

“Remembering the basics of food safety when preparing meals helps ensure a healthy holiday season,” said Julie Goplin, epidemiologist with the Department of Health.

When preparing the holiday meal, people need to be aware that harmful bacteria, called *Salmonella*, often is associated with raw poultry. *Salmonella* causes an infection of the intestine. People who are infected have mild to severe diarrhea, abdominal pains, fever and occasionally vomiting for several days. *Salmonella* infections sometimes can enter the bloodstream and become severe, particularly in the very young or elderly. Cooking poultry to an internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit can effectively kill *Salmonella* bacteria.

The Department of Health recommends the following food safety tips for preparing turkey:

- **Fresh Turkeys.** Purchase fresh turkeys no more than two days before cooking. Do not buy a pre-stuffed fresh turkey.
- **Frozen Turkeys.** Always store a frozen turkey in the freezer until you are ready to thaw it. It is safe to cook a turkey in its frozen state; however, the cooking time will take at least 50 percent longer than recommended for a fully thawed turkey.
- **Three Correct Ways to Thaw a Turkey.**
 - 1) In the refrigerator, allow 24 hours for every four to five pounds. The thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for one to two days.

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- 2) Keep the frozen turkey sealed in its original package. Submerge the frozen turkey in cold water and change the water every 30 minutes, allowing 30 minutes of thawing time for each pound of turkey. Cook the turkey immediately after it is thawed.
 - 3) To thaw the turkey in the microwave oven, follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- **Separate.** Always keep vegetables and side dishes that won't be cooked away from raw turkey. Wash hands often with soap and water to avoid cross contamination. Use warm, soapy water to thoroughly clean all surfaces that come into contact with raw turkey.
 - **Cook.** Set the oven to no lower than 325 degrees Fahrenheit. Use a food thermometer to measure the temperature of the meat in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. Every part of the turkey should reach a minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

It is recommended to cook the stuffing in a separate casserole dish instead of inside the turkey. If the turkey is stuffed, make sure the turkey is stuffed loosely and the middle of the stuffing reaches 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

- **Chill.** Cut leftover turkey into small pieces and refrigerate within two hours of cooking. Store the turkey in shallow containers to allow for more rapid cooling, and make sure the refrigerator temperature is 40 degrees Fahrenheit or lower.
- **Leftovers.** Use refrigerated turkey and stuffing within three to four days. Use gravy within one to two days. If freezing leftovers, use within six months for best quality. Cooked turkey may be eaten cold or reheated. The internal temperature of any reheated food should reach 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

For more information about holiday food safety, contact Julie Goplin, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378. The information provided is adapted from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service. For more information, visit www.fsis.usda.gov.

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